

**Transcript of digitally recorded interview with Thomas Fabian**  
**First session: September 14, 2009**  
**Place: Fabian home, 5412 Hamilton Ave., Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009**  
**Interview and transcription: Mark Junge**

Mark: OK, today is the fourteenth of September 2009. My name is Mark Junge. And I'm in the home of Thomas and Isabel Fabian here in Cheyenne, Wyoming at ...what? ... 5412 ...

Thomas: Hamilton.

Mark: Hamilton. Is there any way we can turn that fan off? I think that's gonna ...

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: I think that's gonna be pretty strong. Here, I think that cord will stretch, Tom.

Thomas: OK?

Mark: Good. Good. So, anyway, we're here at 5412 Hamilton in Cheyenne, Wyoming and today we're gonna talk ... Tom's gonna tell us a little bit about himself and his early life and his family and some of the family traditions, a little about the background of the family as far back as he can remember. And then we're gonna talk about his military experiences and maybe something about the postwar experiences, your work experiences which I think are pretty interesting, too. So, OK, just to begin with give me your full name, place of birth and date of birth.

Thomas: Thomas Ray Fabian. Born July 17, 1922. Kemmerer, Wyoming.

Mark: OK. And your parents were who?

Thomas: George and Julia Fabian.

Mark: And when were they born? Approximately.

Thomas: Oh, boy. Uh, in the early 1900s. In fact, I think my dad was ... in the early 1900s. That's the best I could tell you.

Mark: Yeah, OK. Now your mother's maiden name was ... and I didn't know how to pronounce this. "Gorank" or "Gorentz"? [the name is spelled Gorenc]

Thomas: Gorentz. G-O-R-E-N-C-E.

Mark: Oh, it did have an "E" on the end.

Thomas: No, it didn't. G-O-R-E-N-C.

Mark: "E-N-C" ... "Gorentz." That's Yugoslavian, right?

Thomas: Yeah. ... I can't even think of the country now. I'm gonna have to ask my wife. Isabel, where ... Slovenia. Slovenia. [she answers, "Slovenia"]. Part of Yugoslavia. Part of old Yugoslavia.

Mark: OK. What is the meaning of "Nahv-zhe-dravhna"?

Thomas: Zhe-dravhna. That means, like, "prosit". Good luck. To take a drink.

Mark: [laughs]. OK. Do you understand Slovenian?

Thomas: Oh, a little bit. Not much. When we were kids my mother used to speak Slovenian and we'd talk to her in American. She couldn't speak American too well so she spoke in Slovenian and that's about how I learned, what little I did learn about Slovenia.

Mark: Did your dad speak it, too?

Thomas: Yeah, he was up there, too. He was Slovenian.

Mark: Now your dad died in 1928.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: What do you remember about him?

Thomas: Not very much. Very little. I was, I guess, six years old at the time. And I didn't have much memory about him. When I was a little kid ... there is very few things that I remember about my one-to-six.

Mark: Yeah, I see.

Thomas: I remember he was a big tall guy and he kinda ruled the roost at home. He was a gentle person and yet he was firm in making the kids grow up right, and honest, and instilled all of that in all of us.

Mark: Yeah. Well, your brothers and sisters would remember him better than you would, probably.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: How many kids were there in the family?

Thomas: There was ten altogether. One of 'em died. My little sister, Rosie. She was eighteen months old when she died. And that was before I was born. ... One of my brothers was sick

in bed and he had a bunch of pills on the dresser there next to the bed and little Rosie got those pills and swallowed all the pills and she died.

Mark: You don't know what kind of pills they were, do you?

Thomas: No, I don't have any idea.

Mark: Oh, my gosh ... oh.

Thomas: Back in those days, uh, I guess my dad really took that hard. He was ... they didn't have coroners or anything back in that days. And when she died he just took her over in the cemetery, dug a hole, and him and another guy that helped him buried her ...right there. And she's ... I've been goin' up to her grave up in Kemmerer. In Cumberland, not Kemmerer. But Cumberland was about twenty miles south of Kemmerer. And they still have the cemetery there that a few people still go there . And I used to go up there every year and fix her grave up, and put some flowers on it.

Mark: Really? Can you give me through the birth order? I mean, who was born first and who were the children in order?

Thomas: My sister, Mary, was the first. Julia was the second. Susan. Then I guess it was George. Then Ston [Stan]. Then Helen. Then Margaret. Then Dorothy, then me.

Mark: OK. And there was a Julia? Was there a Julia?

Thomas: Yes. She was second.

Mark: OK. I keep running across the word "Ston" in the family ....

Thomas: Stanley.

Mark: Yeah, that was ....

Thomas: His real name was Stanley.

Mark: Where'd he get the name, "Ston"?

Thomas: From the Yugoslavian "Stanislaw".

Mark: Ohhhhh. Stanislaw ... no wonder.

Thomas: [laughs] Yeah.

Mark: OK.

Thomas: See, we just shortened it to "Ston".

Mark: OK. Now, the first boy was George?

Thomas: Yes.

Mark: I assume that George was named, "George" because his dad was George.

Thomas: Yeah, Gregor.

Mark: Gregor.

Thomas: Yeah, That was the Slovenian name for George ... "Gregor".

Mark: OK. What about ... now, Fabian is not really "Fay-be-un". It was like ...

Thomas: Nope, it was "Fah yan'-sitch".

Mark: "Fab-yan'-sitch".

Thomas: Yep. "F-A-B-J-A-N-C-I-C -H. [laughs].

Mark: [laughs] How did that name get changed?

Thomas: Uh, from what I hear, from what my sister told me. My sisters Mary and Julia say they come here to .... They were immigrants and they went through the place there in New York. What do you call that place?

Mark: Ellis Island.

Thomas: Yeah. They went through there and I guess, uh, they had such a hard time getting him to spell his name and all that, you know, and then pronouncing the name correctly. So they just said, "From now on your name's "Fabian". So it was F-A-B-J-A-N. "J" is pronounced "Y" in Slovenian. And it was "Fab-yah-nah."

Mark: "Fab-yahn".

Thomas: Yeah. And then they gradually worked into "Fay-bian".

[Isabella offers Mark some coffee]

Mark: A little cream, thank you. Isabel just brought me a cup of coffee.

Thomas: Ah, good. Helps out.

Mark: Are you gonna have some?

Thomas: No, I had mine already.

Mark: Oh, OK. Did your ... now, let's see, your dad spoke Slovenian, as well?

Thomas: Yes.

Mark: Did they meet here in this country?

Thomas: Oh, boy, I don't know.

Mark: Cause I thought they lived at first, or he lived at first, in Pennsylvania. Western Pennsylvania.

Thomas: Yeah, they come to Pennsylvania. Then, most of the people from there worked in the mines in Pennsylvania for a while and then they heard about these mines out here and they come out this way.

Mark: Did you ever hear from -- and I know this is going back beyond your birth date -- but did you ever hear any stories that they told about the old country or ....

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Mark: Did you?

Thomas: Yes, Fact, I got some pictures up on the wall up there where my mother was born and .... You want to take at those? [laughs].

Mark: We'll do that, let's do that a little later. What did they tell you about the old country?

Thomas: Oh, my mother told me quite a bit about it. They lived on a farm and they, uh, my mother was, uh, ran a boarding house over there when she was young. That's where she learned how to cook and take care of things. But, God, I don't recall whether they were married here or over there. I don't remember. I can't tell you.

Mark: Well, she became naturalized, though, a naturalized citizen.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So she probably was born over there, I would imagine, but married here.

Thomas: I think that's the way it was, yeah. They knew each other from over there, though.

Mark: Oh, they did?

Thomas: Yeah, they knew each other there.

Mark: What did she say about the old homestead or, you know, what it was like in Slovenia?

Thomas: Well, just the regular farm, uh, earning their bread and butter out there. It was a lot of hard work. And raising crops and raising pigs and a cow and all that [laughs]. We still did that over in this country, raised pigs and ... keep us alive.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. Was that ... did she say it was a tough life or a good life over there?

Thomas: Oh, it must have been tough because they emigrated over here. They heard, well, there was a lot of people over there that learned ... you know, they heard about the Americans and everybody was making huge amounts of monies over here. They weren't making any money to speak of. Just living off the land.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: None of 'em had any jobs. They just lived on a farm and ....

Mark: Did they, did she ever talk about her parents? What kind of people they were?

Thomas: No, the only I remember about that is, I remember when she got the letter from the old country that her mother had died. And it was a letter edged in black. I remember that.

Mark: Really? Edged in black.

Thomas: Edged in black it means that somebody died. And I remember her really taking that hard, losing her mother.

Mark: Yeah. Was she raised ...were you all raised Catholic?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So she was Catholic over there?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK. Yeah, now this was ... she was born ... I think I read somewhere that she was born about 1906. No. No, that couldn't be right because you were born in '22.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So she was born and raised Catholic on a Catholic farm, and then she knew her husband before she came over here.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: That's what she said, anyway.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: OK. Did she ever say how she met him?

Thomas: No, the only thing I can tell you about that is my dad had something against the Catholic ... I guess the priests back in those days were pretty strict and evidently he did something to, that really displeased my father. And my father wouldn't have anything ... my dad wouldn't have anything to do with him when he died. He wouldn't even see him on his deathbed.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Wouldn't let the priest come in and see him on his deathbed.

Mark: Man, that must have been a serious, serious thing. I mean, when you're on your deathbed, you know.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: I don't know what it was. I just, uh, I know there was a lot of people that way. Isabel, uh, my wife's parents were kinda like that, too. They didn't care much for the priests back in those days. They were too strict. They ruled you like, I don't know .... [laughs].

Mark: Yeah, yeah. Well, you were raised strict as well, weren't you?

Thomas: Oh yes. Yeah, but not religiously. Didn't go to church much. I wasn't baptized until I was thirty-some years old.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: Yep.

Mark: Why?

Thomas: I don't know. I think that was one of the reasons because my dad had it in for the Catholic Church. I don't know what it was.

Mark: Did your parents make you go to church?

Thomas: No. I didn't start going to church until after I got married.

Mark: So, then, Isabel made you go to church.

Thomas: Yeah. Well, we got married ... we got married in a Catholic church down in Tucson, Arizona. I didn't get baptized until after I got home from the war. I was like Jesus: 33 years old when I was baptized. [laughs]

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: [continues to laugh]. That was ...I gotta tell you this. There was a Catholic priest over at ...in the islands before we'd go on a mission he'd climb up in the airplane and ask if you wanted to go to confession and do this and that. And he come up to me and he asked me if I wanted to go to confession and I said, "Jeez, father, I ain't even baptized." He says, "Well, I'll take care of ya right away." He says, "You wanta get ... I'll baptize ya right here and now if you want to be baptized." Then, me, I says, "Nah, nah. That's OK." [Thomas and Mark laugh; Isabel in background says, "Tried to straighten him out when he could, though."]

Mark: Wanted to straighten him out. Well, your wife was more a sincere Catholic than you were then ... at the time.

Thomas: Oh, yes, yes.

Mark: At the time.

Yeah, we got married in Tucson, Arizona by Father ... what was it? [Isabel answers, "Joseph, John"] Yeah, Joseph John Taylor.

Mark: OK. Well, going back to your background now, did you ... you don't remember much about your dad so obviously -- I would say "obviously" -- he didn't tell you any stories that you can remember about the old country, or growing up, or being a miner or anything like that?

Thomas: No. No, I didn't hear very much about that. I don't remember it, anyway. No, he ....

Mark: He was a miner, though, right?

Thomas: Oh, yes. Yeah.

Mark: Yeah. And wasn't it the mines that killed him?

Thomas: Pneumonia killed him. There was a lotta guys caught what they called "Miner's Consumption". I believe that was what ... now, today it's known as the "Black Lung" that killed a lot of 'em. But I don't know whether he ... probably it partially was at fault, that Black Lung. He was only ... he wasn't quite 50 years old, I don't think, when he died. Right around fifty. And, uh, I don't remember much about him.

Mark: Yeah. Did you remember him coming home dirty, or did they clean up before they left the plant?



Thomas: I don't remember any of that, no.

Mark: Yeah, that was a dangerous job.

Thomas: Oh, sure. Back in those mines there, they were full of explosive gas. Had a couple of terrible explosions there around Kemmerer and killed several hundred people. Blaze on ... and a couple of other explosions there that killed a lot of people.

Mark: There were a couple that were mentioned in this book I read about ethnic groups in Wyoming and apparently there were two explosions in the Frontier mine.

Thomas: Yes.

Mark: And one of 'em killed ninety-nine and the other one killed, like thirty-nine or something like that.

Thomas: It was pretty bad.

Mark: So, I mean, just to go to work in those days. Can you imagine? I mean, you went to work in tough situations when you were flying that bomber. Cause you coulda been knocked out of the sky at any moment. But he went to work every day, maybe not knowing that his lungs were affected.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: You know?

Thomas: And they didn't promote safety a heckuva lot back in those days. Later on in the mines, the mines were pretty good around Superior and Rock Springs, they were pretty safe but ... as far as explosions go. Course, they had to put up with cave-ins and other accidents in mines. But explosions were very rare.

Mark: Yeah. Now you were raised in Kemmerer.

Thomas: Cumberland, more. Cumberland.

Mark: [receives coffee or treats from Isabel]. Thank you. Cumberland?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Oh, I thought you were ... but you were born in Kemmerer.

Thomas: Kemmerer Hospital, yah. Me and my sister, Dorothy, were the only two that were born in the hospital. We were both born in Kemmerer Hospital. I don't know why, but we were the last two born ... why that was, either. Everybody else was born at home.

Mark: Yeah, things were different in those days. Yeah, they probably had ... they might not even have had a doctor in right? Or did they have a mid-

Thomas: Oh, yeah, they had a doctor, yeah.

Mark: Uh-huh.

Thomas: One doctor in each town. Even when we were in Superior there was only one doctor.

Mark: Yeah, Well, uh, how many of your brothers and sisters are alive?

Thomas: I got two alive.

Mark: You're the youngest so these are ... so where are they?

Thomas: Dorothy's in Ogden, Utah and my sister, Margaret, is up in Riverton in a home.

Mark: Are they both mentally *compos mentis*, do think?

Thomas: Well, Dorothy isn't too bad. My sister Margaret, the one up in Riverton out by the home there, she's, she doesn't know anybody. She's in her own little world. Alzheimer's.

Mark: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: She's just ... just a vegetable, I guess. I haven't seen her for, oh, about a year now. I was planning on going up there this summer but got tied up on this project and a couple other things and couldn't make it up there. I still might go up and see her.

Mark: Your remodeling project you're talking about, yeah. Well, tell ...if you can, Tom, take me back a little bit to those early days growing up in ... uh, you don't remember much about Cumberland. You would remember Superior, right?

Thomas: Yeah, mostly Superior. I remember a little bit about Cumberland. I went there, I guess, the first and second grades there. I remember the name of the teacher, Miss Irene. And I was in, uh ....The only thing I remember about school there was what they told me. I didn't want to go to school unless I could take my father's gold watch with me. So that's the way I went to school is, they bribed me and let me take my father's gold watch. In fact, I still got that gold watch here.

Mark: [laughs] Why did you want a gold watch?

Thomas: [laughs] I don't know. Don't ask me. They just bribed me with it. That's what it was. I guess I must have been ... must have been wanting a watch or something. I thought it was a real nice watch. And that's the way they did it. "Here, take this and you can go to school."

Mark: What's your first memory, your actual first memory?

Thomas: Whew! [breathes deeply] Let's see. We were talking about that the other day, too, and I ... oh, probably ... probably the cats and dogs that we owned in Cumberland. Cats, mainly. I loved cats. I got in a lot of trouble over those cats, too.

Mark: How so?

Thomas: At night they wanted to come in, and so my sisters had to get up and let 'em in. And when they got in the house then they started raising a fuss. And so my mother and my father kicked the cats out. [laughs] And so it's back and forth like that. My sister told me that it was all for me. Oh, and I remember another thing. My two sisters, Helen and Margaret ... They had a carnival in Cumberland. And they had boxing matches there. And one of our good friends went and fought against the carnival fighter. And my sisters wanted to go in there so bad but they were babysitting me. And so they snuck in and they snuck me in with 'em. And I remember the boxing matches. They started bleeding and it scared the hell out of me and I started crying and they had to take me out and take me home. And they were so mad at me because they wanted to watch the boxing matches.

[Thomas and Mark both laugh]

Mark: Well, you couldn't stand the sight of blood.

Thomas: No, no. I was scared. I started yellin' and cryin', I guess.

Mark: Did you ... I assume that you didn't have a car at that time.

Thomas: No, no.

Mark: You walked everywhere.

Thomas: Oh, yes, yeah.

Mark: Well, did you ... how far was Cumberland from Kemmerer?

Thomas: 'Bout sixteen miles.

Mark: Well, you didn't walk between the two, did you?

Thomas: Oh no, no. Huh-uh. Oh, like, I guess if people offered to give you a ride if you had to go to the hospital or something like that, I imagine.

Mark: By horse and buggy or by car?

Thomas: Well, it coulda been that, too, yeah.

Mark: Do your remember ....

Thomas: But there were a few cars.

Mark: Oh, there were?

Thomas: I remember when the mines closed there, there was a good friend of ours by the name of Burke and they were Finn ... Finnish people. And he had a brand new Nash car and he rode our family over to, from Cumberland to Superior. And my brothers drove an old Model T Ford from Cumberland to Superior. And I remember my brothers sayin' later on in life, sayin', "Boy that was real Tobacco Road there because there because they had this Model T Ford loaded up with furniture, and dogs and cats and a lamb and ...

Mark: A lamb?

Thomas: [laughs] Yeah, a little lamb that we used to raise. [continues to laugh] We had lamb chops, too, every once in a while. It was tough times. But I remember, hell, we always had a nice garden and we always raised a couple of pigs and butchered them in the fall and ....

Mark: Who did the butchering?

Thomas: Oh, a bunch of those Slovenian people got together. I left. I hated that. I didn't want to be around. And the way they did it, just ....

Mark: What do you mean?

Thomas: Oh, they got a bunch of guys and wrestled a pig to the ground. And then we had a guy that was the sticker with the knife. He was ... he was like a specialist. [laughs] And they stuck him in the throat there and got down into where they'd catch all the blood so they could make blood sausage. I don't know whether you've ever heard of blood sausage but they ... and I just hated it. I remember the pig squealin' and yell. After that I took off and went out in the hills. I didn't want to be around that whole day. I come home at night and in the garage there, that pig was hangin' there all cleaned, skinned and hangin' up in the garage split in half. I didn't get in on any of that. I didn't want to be in on that.

Mark: But you ate the pig?

Thomas: Oh, sure, yes, yeah. Yes, we used every bit of the pig. Like they say, you used everything but the squeal.

Mark: [laughs] Even the tail?

Thomas: Oh, everything, yeah. They made what they called "zoolshah". It was pig knuckles and stuff. And they boiled this stuff up [laughs]. I think it's there someplace.

Mark: "Z-O-O-L-S-A"?

Thomas: Yeah, something like that.

Mark: [he pronounces "zoolshah"]

Thomas: Yeah. That's what it was. It was pig knuckles. They boiled that stuff and put it in bowls and put it in the window to cool at night and then it'd kinda jell over. We ate everything. We smoked the meat, made ham and bacon out of it.

Mark: How was the ham compared to what the hams are like today?

Thomas: Uh ... probably a lot stronger, smoke-wise. More smoky taste to it.

Mark: Probably a little drier, too?

Thomas: Yeah. The way we smoked 'em was we had a washtub with a bunch of holes poked in it. And hang this meat up in the shed and then built a fire under that tub with wood, shut the door and let is smoke.

Mark: What was your favorite part of the cow, er, pig?

Thomas: Probably the meat and the sausage that they made.

Mark: And you didn't help make sausage, either.

Thomas: Yep. I did that.

Mark: Oh, you did?

Thomas: Everybody pitched in doin' that.

Mark: Yeah, I was gonna say, you had to be doin' something.

Thomas: [laughs] Yes. Cleanin' up mostly and, but .... Oh, I remember another incident down when we were in Superior. We had slaughtered a pig and we were in the house. And there was a bunch of guys in there. Like I say, all these Slovenian people that get together when we slaughtered a pig. And they were making blood sausage. And when you make blood sausage you got blood all over the place. They'd roll their sleeves way up, you know, and get in there and mix that blood with rice and whatever else we put in there. And some salesman come to the door. And he knocked at the door. And they opened the door and he saw what was goin' on in there and he says, "Oh, never mind." He turned around and left. He thought somebody got butchered in there, I guess [laughs].

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Oh, that was really a mess. They had big 'ol washtubs, you know. And there was a lotta rice in here and a lotta the pig meat was ground up and skin and everything and mixed it in there with the rice. And then they'd pour the blood in there and they would .... They had a sausage machine with a big handle on it, and you'd put stuff in there and push down on it and it would come out here. And it would into -- what do you call it --

Mark: Casing?

Thomas: Casing, yeah. Pig casing.

Mark: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: Then they'd boil those sausages and later on they'd eat 'em.

Mark: You'd hang 'em up somewhere by a string?

Thomas: Yeah, Um-hmm.

Mark: Yeah, my dad used to work in a packinghouse so I'm familiar with some of these things. In fact, he got his start sticking hogs.

Thomas: Yeah?

Mark: That's how he got his start in the packinghouse.

Thomas: Well, they did that for a long, long time and then, finally, this young guy that belonged to, that was the sticker's son, Tony Dolenz, his name was. He says, "Let me show you how to do this and you won't have to fool around with that." And so they said, "OK". So he went over there when they were gonna butcher a hog. And instead of stickin' he had a gun. And he went, "Bang!", right between the pig's eyes like that. [laughs] And the pig went down and then they stuck him. And there was nothing to it. After that, that's the way they always did it after that. But up until that time it was always that sticker, with the squealin' and, oh, boy.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. Um, now your mom was a pretty good cook.

Thomas: Oh, man, was she. Yeah.

Mark: Tell me about some of the foods she used to make, or the dishes.

Thomas: She ...well, all the stuff that they ... the sausage. We had smoked sausage out of that, too, not only blood sausage. Good smoked sausage. It'd hang down out there with the ham and bacon and everything. And grind the meat up and put it in a casing, like you say, and then hang it up, and we had smoked garlic sausage. And, uh, she done all the cookin' like that. My mother could cook anything.

[Isabel in background: Yeah, she could cook anything]

Thomas: She cooked and baked and roasted stuff and ....

[Isabel: roasts, baked ... bake, baked anything, pies]

Thomas: She [referring to Isabel] learned a lot from me tellin' her how my mother did this and how my mother did that, and we still have some real good Slovenian dinners.

Isabel: Roast turkey, she'd always have a big turkey dinner for everyone. And she'd have the sweet potatoes and everything else to go with it.

Mark: Uh, let's see. I was gonna ask you about certain foods. Now, I hope I'm pronouncing these right. "Kaseelo?" "Kusselo". K-E-S-I-L-O?

Isabel: I never heard of that.

Mark: OK, Repa? R-E-P-A.

Thomas: Repa. [he pronounces it, "quiche larepa"] That's, uh ....

Mark: That's what I was trying to ....

Thomas: Sour. Sour turnips.

Mark: Sour turnips.

Thomas: I think that's what that was. "Quiche la repa". Yeah. "Quiche" was "sour". "La repa" is turnips.

Mark: OK, what about [he pronounces it, "Kissla Zelchay"]?

Thomas: Probably something else sour. I don't know what it would be. Sauerkraut. We ate a lot of sauerkraut. Now, that's cabbage.

Mark: Do you remember how they made that?

Thomas: Oh, yes. Yeah. We'd get the cabbage and had a machine that we run across there and back and forth, and you'd shred it and then you'd put it in a crock and let it set there for -- I don't know how long -- weeks, I guess. In a stone crock. Put some boards across em, a big rock to put some pressure on it as it cured.

Mark: Um-hmm. And then did you just keep adding to it, or what?

Thomas: Yeah, you'd put enough in there to ... you didn't add it. Once they put it in there it kinda ... that would work on it. Just press whatever we had in there.

Mark: Oh, you'd press it?

Thomas: Yeah, the rock would force it down. Lay down a big rock about like that ...

Mark: Oh, Oh.

Thomas: ... and put it right on top of the crock with some boards across it and it would just keep compressin' it and pretty soon the juice'd be comin' up and ... they could tell when it was ready, I guess.

Mark: How long did it take to make?

Thomas: Oh, I don't know. Probably coupla weeks, somethin' like that. I don't know.

Mark: But if it just kept in that crock it would get poisonous after a while.

Thomas: Oh, it would spoil.

Mark: It would spoil.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So you had to know when to take it out.

Thomas: Oh, I guess so. Kinda ... what do you call it when you put stuff in somethin' like that? What do you call it? I don't ...

Isabel: You probably put some kind of preservative or vinegar or something in it. I don't know. My mother ....

Thomas: Well, she put some ...

Isabel: Spices.

Thomas: She put some peppers and some of that little, tiny seeds that you put in there. I don't know what they were.

Mark: Cloves or caraway or ....

Thomas: Mighta' been caraway seeds, yeah, something like that.

Mark: And, then, did she can?



Thomas: She never canned anything like that. They always put it in jars, yeah. Not cans. Jars.

Mark: Not, uh ... she didn't do any canning, then?

Thomas: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Mark: Oh, that's what I meant: canning. Where she had a pot on the stove. And then she put the glass jars in.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: She did a lot of canning.

Thomas: Yeah, she did a lot of puttin' away peaches and stuff like that.

Mark: Peaches?

Thomas: Yeah. Peaches and pears and ...

Mark: Where would you get peaches? They didn't grow peaches in ....

Thomas: [chuckles] Bought 'em at the grocery store.

Mark: Oh.

Thomas: They didn't raise anything there. You couldn't raise anything over there. In the fall the farmers would come around sellin' their goods from wherever they raised these things. Some of 'em come from around Salt Lake and Evanston.

Mark: Did they have trucks or wagons or what?

Thomas: I guess so. They musta' had trucks.

Mark: Yeah. Now what about "solaht"? S-O-L-A-T. "solaht"

Thomas: Solat is a lettuce.

Mark: OK. That's what they made the sauerkraut, no ....

Thomas: Cabbage.

Mark: Cabbage.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: "Korenje"

Thomas: [purses his lips]

Mark: K-O-R-E-N and then J-E.

Thomas: I don't know what that is. "Kor-in-jah" [he pronounces it].

Mark: Kor-en-zha.

Thomas: "Korenj"

Mark: How about "Fazol?" F-I-Z-O-L. "Fissal" ... "Fizzol".

Thomas: That sounds like Italian.

Mark: Yeah, it does.

Thomas: Pasta fazool.

Mark: [laughs] Yeah. Raypee ... R-E-P-I. Raypa? Ray-Pee? Maybe that's just "repe", the sour or whatever. "Rizoota"

Thomas: Rizzuto [Risotto?] was chicken under ice.

Mark: OK. And then there's one that starts with "K". K-N-E-D-E-L-D-E. "kahnelda"? "Canelda"?

Thomas: [laughs]

Mark: I got these out of the cookbook. That's why I'm asking. OK. Rezenza?

Isabel: OK, well, let's see, where's that cookbook. If I can find it, it might show what's in 'em.

Mark: Uh, the cookbook, I think, is in this album here.

Isabel: Do you have one there? Oh.

Mark: Well, there is one in there. OK, what about polenta?

Thomas: Polenta?

Isabel: Corn meal mush.

Thomas: Corn meal mush, yeah.

Mark: Zyguncha. Z-G-U-N-C-H-A. "Ziguncha"?

Thomas: It was corn meal mush and, well, let's see. What was that, again?

Mark: Z-G-U-N-C-H-A. Looks like "Za-guncha".

Thomas: Maybe that's "Zagancha".

Isabel: "Zagancha".

Isabel: Yeah. It's flour and eggs and a little bit of sugar and, uh.

Thomas: We still make that here.

Isabel: You mix it up and pour it in a frying pan in some oil or grease and let it cook like ... and then stomp it into little pieces. It's just flour and eggs and salt and sugar and ....

Mark: Oh, OK.

Thomas: You use a potato masher to ....

Isabel: Yeah. They eat it with coffee and put sugar on it and eat it [with?] coffee and cheese.

Mark: OK. What's Zoolsa? Zoolsha? "Z- ....

Thomas: Zulsa is that ....

Isabel: Head cheese?

Thomas: That's the pig feet in the ....

Mark: Oh, that's right. Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: It jelled.

Mark: "Chow-chow". What was "Chow-chow"?

Thomas: Chow-chow was kind of a mustard, uh, with pickles, and cauliflower and onions. It was ... uh, kind of used it as a ...

Mark: A relish?

Isabel: Yeah. Like a relish.

Mark: Was it a relish?

Thomas: Yeah, kind of like ... you used it with meat and stuff.

Isabel: ... you cooked it and canned it in the jars.

Mark: OK. And then you had smoked meat pie?

Thomas: Smoked meat pie?

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Well, we had the smoked meat. I don't know about the pie.

Mark: Cause I think it was Ston in his memoir who said something about he preferred ... somebody, George or Ston, preferred the smoked meat pie.

Isabel: I never heard of that.

Thomas: I don't know. We ate all kinds of smoked meat. I just, uh, all the meat was smoked back then.

Mark: Well, maybe they had to preserve it.

Thomas: Maybe they ground some up or something and made hamburgers out of 'em or somethin'. I don't know. That could be it. I don't know.

Mark: So what was your favorite food, your mom made?

Thomas: [laughs and pauses] Oh, boy. Probably some of the cakes and pies that she made. I don't know, I wasn't ....

Isabel: Poteetsa.

Thomas: Potitsa. Yeah. That's it. That's the one. Potitsa was kind of a nut bread.

Isabel: Sweet dough with nuts ... and baked.

Thomas: Yeah, and they rolled it up and made a bread out of it.

Mark: Well, I remember you saying in your journal -- you wrote a little diary when you were in the service, kept a diary -- and you mentioned at some point in time your mother some ... or something and sent it .... Did she send you stuff in the mail every once in a while?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: Potitsa, maybe.

Thomas: Coulda been potitsa, yeah. My sister always sent me some fudge when I was in the service. She made real good fudge ... my older sister, Susie, she was the fudge maker.

Mark: Now you had nine kids in that family and your mother, your mother's husband, your died in '28. So she had to raise you kids. How did she ... she musta gotten up early in the morning. I mean, how did she do this?

Thomas [chuckles] Oh, she ... she just worked twelve, fifteen hours a day, is probably ....

Isabel: They had boarders that they took care of in those days. The women took care of people that worked in the [mines?] ....

Thomas: Well, we had one, one boarder or two, but my mother just more or less raised the kids by herself.

Isabel: She washed clothes, too, 'cause I remember ....

Thomas: She'd get up at three o'clock in the morning and put the boiler on the fire and put lye in it and took all day washing and ironing. From three o'clock in the morning 'till late at night she was ... she would iron all the clothes and laundry all the clothes and everybody always said we didn't have a doggone thing but we always come to school with nice, clean clothes. My mother was a fantastic ... she's an angel. No question about it in my mind.

Isabel: But they tell us ...they say that she used to wash clothes for people, too. They used to take 'em and keep a nickel or something.

Thomas: Yeah, they'd go ...she'd wash clothes and iron 'em and ...

Isabel: For different people.

Thomas: ... take 'em in for ... charge 'em a quarter or something like that for a bushel basket. And my two sisters, Dorothy, er... Helen or Margaret'd keep a dime and bring home fifteen cents. [Thomas and Mark both laugh].

Mark: Did your mother have a regular schedule? Like Monday was washday, Tuesday was whatever.

Thomas: I think Monday was washday, yeah.

Mark: Was it?

Thomas: Yeah. It seems to me like it was, yeah.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: They had an old copper boiler that you had to get all the grease and stuff out of the clothes, and that was put up on top of a coal stove. And they'd ... she'd put lye in it. And then all the clothes that were really dirty with grease and the coal mine clothes, clothing, would go in there and that would clean 'em out real good. Then they'd have to be rinsed. And had an old machine with ringers on it. By the way, I was talking about this the other day. When I was a little boy; that's another thing that I remember. I don't remember it but this was an electric machine, washing machine, with the ringers on it. And I got my hand caught in the ringers one time it was going. And it took my arm up all the way up to the shoulder. And my two oldest sisters, Mary and Julia, Mary was runnin' around .... This -- Julia told me about this -- Mary was runnin' around sayin', "He's gonna die, he's gonna die, he's gonna die." And I guess the machine was tryin' to tear my arm off and Julia come over there and she pulled the plug out of the machine and stopped it. And then they released it and got my arm out.

Mark: What did it do to your arm?

Thomas: I don't remember that it hurt it at all. I was little. I don't remember. I musta just been a baby about that time. I guess it coulda killed me, that's for sure. They said it went right up to my shoulder, my left arm.

Mark: You had electricity then.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah, electric.

Mark: Was that supplied by the company?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK. Cause I was gonna say, most people didn't have electricity, right?

Isabel: Not in the beginning, but after ....

Thomas: Oh, in Cumberland we had it. We had electric lights and radios and stuff. Not many radios, but ....

Mark: Did you have a telephone?

Thomas: No. Never got telephones until we moved into Superior.

Isabel: We didn't have a telephone until after we were married ... after he came home from the war.

Thomas: Yeah, when we moved ... It was a long time after 1945, '46, I guess.

Isabel: Oh, I think it was after that. We were ...moved down. It was about, close to 1950, '48 or '50.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So how did you communicate, I mean, without a telephone in those days?

Isabel: Letters ... if they were any distance. That's all.

Thomas: Oh, in town they, people more or less got together and knew what was goin' on. There wasn't a heckuva lot of news back in those days. People visited every once in a while but, uh ... it isn't like today. Jump on the phone and talk on the phone for any little reason.

Mark: Do you like to talk on the phone?

Thomas: [laughs] No, I don't. And these cell phones, they really irritate the hell out of me.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: I think they oughta ban 'em myself.

Mark: Did you guys have ... do you remember the first car ... you had?

Thomas: [speaking to himself] First car I ever had.

Isabel: The Ford.

Thomas: Well, I know in Cumberland they had the Model T Ford. I was tellin' ya that when I moved from Cumberland to Superior it was Tobacco Road.

Mark: Had a few flat tires, I imagine.

Thomas: Oh, yeah, everything.

Mark: They used to talk about how those cars, I don't know if it was a Model T or a Model A, but if you went up a hill that was too steep the car died on ya. You had to go up backwards. Did you ever hear about that?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: Because of the carburetion, or something?

Thomas: I don't know what it was. Me and her brother and a coupla other kids put a Model T Ford together back in Superior one time just from goin' around to all the junk piles and pickin' up all the parts and puttin' it together.

Mark: Really.

Thomas: Yeah. Her brother was somethin' Let her tell ya about her brother. He was really something else, again.

Mark: Mechanically, you mean?

Thomas: Yeah. Everything. He did a little bit of everything.

Mark: Now ... you remember Cumberland pretty well 'cause you went to first and second grade there ... why did you guys move over? [to Superior]

Thomas: The mines closed. They shut down.

Mark: Why?

Thomas: I guess they didn't the mine, er, the coal much for the railroads ... or the mines around Superior and Rock Springs were takin' over all of the ... or furnishing all the coal for the railroads. See, the mines, the Union Pacific mines exclusively mined coal for steam engines on the railroad. That's it. They didn't sell the coal to anything else.

Mark: Not for heating or cooking?

Thomas: Well, for heating, yeah. Everybody had a coal shed in the back, and coal stoves.

Mark: So your mom's stove was a coal stove.

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: So who used bank the stove at night and carry out the ashes and ....?

Thomas: She did, usually.

Mark: You kids didn't do that?

Thomas: No. We were spoiled [laughs]. No, my mother took care of everything just about.

Mark: She was a stout woman. I saw a picture of her.

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: She looked like she could of ....

Thomas: Yeah, she was strong. She hadda be strong.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: Didn't have any teeth.



Mark: What's that? Didn't have any....

Thomas: Didn't have any teeth.

Mark: She lost her teeth early? Did she have false teeth?

Thomas: No false teeth. Couldn't afford it.

Mark: How did she eat?

Thomas: Just gummed everything [laughs]. She managed. Oh, I tell you. She was quite a woman.

Mark: Wow. Yeah. Now, what kind of a house did you live in, in Cumberland? Can you remember that?

Thomas: Yeah, we had a two bedroom, living room, kitchen. And the mine superintendent, he was a good guy. He helped us out. He let us have a three-room house right next door to us. Let us have that rent-free. I think the rent was something like \$14 a month, something like that.

Mark: For your house.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: But the other one was free.

Thomas: Yeah, he give us that for free.

Mark: Yeah, because otherwise you woulda' stacked those kids like cordwood.

Thomas: Oh, yeah, we did. Hell, I used to sleep with my sisters back in those days and I used to sleep at the foot of the bed. I don't know whether...

Mark: Really?

Thomas: ... you ever heard that song.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sleepin' at the foot of the bed

Thomas: Two people sleepin' this way and the other sleepin' the other way. We had a couch in our house and it opened up into a bed. And three kids slept in that thing.

Mark: How did you do it?

Thomas: [laughs].

Mark: How did you get any sleep?

Thomas: Oh, you just learned to do it, that's all, something that come by automatically.

Mark: Yeah, but as you grew up you couldn't do that any more.

Thomas: Oh, no. Well, later on then we had a shed built out in the back with a bed in it and I stayed there a lot, in that shed out in the back. They had a bed in there and a coal stove to keep it warm.

Mark: In the wintertime?

Thomas: Um-hmm. Yeah, I slept up there all the time.

Mark: With your brothers, or just by yourself, or ...

Thomas: Uhh ... Back then we didn't have all of the family together then. We had, my sisters, my two older sisters stayed in Kemmerer and they worked up in Kemmerer. And then, uh, they weren't there. And ... hell, I don't remember how we slept.

Mark: What did your sisters do in Kemmerer?

Thomas: They ... one of 'em worked at the Kemmerer Hotel and then the other one, I think, worked at a clothing store there. Maybe it was the J.C. Penney Store, I don't remember.

Mark: That was the first Penney store.

Thomas: Yeah. I think that one of 'em worked there. They were in Kemmerer all their teenage life. Workin'. Sendin' a few bucks home every month. Keep things goin'.

Mark: Yeah, Did your mom sew?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So she had to ... did she make your clothes? 'Cause I remember my wife saying that her mother made ....some of their clothes.

Thomas: No, she ... Well, I guess she probably made some dresses and stuff like that, maybe, but I always had overalls. And [chuckles] shoes that we re-soled. You know, put new soles on 'em. Everybody had a shoe last and when the shoe had a hole in it, why, you'd put it on this last and get a piece of leather, or piece of rubber, and re-soled it. Yeah.

Mark: Wow.

Thomas: I remember one time they sent away in a cata ... we used to do a lotta shoppin' in the catalogue and, uh ....

Mark: What, the Sears Catalogue? Or Montgomery Wards?

Thomas: Yeah, one of those, yeah, yeah. And I remember I wanted a ... I saw those boots in the catalogue and I wanted those boots so bad and so my dad ...my mother said, "OK, we'll get you those boots." And we got the boots and they were too tight. Right across, right across here. They were too tight.

Mark: Across the ankle.

Thomas: And they were gonna, she was gonna send 'em back. So I got a hold of those boots and I cut a hole in there [laughs] so they would fit and wouldn't hurt my feet. And oh, boy, did I ever catch hell over that. I wanted those boots so bad and I didn't want 'em to send 'em back. And so I had to wear the boots with holes in 'em.

Mark: Did you have, did you have, like some kids had work clothes or school clothes and then Sunday clothes.

Isabel: Yes.

Mark: Did you have ....

Thomas: Oh, all I remember is overalls. That's the only thing I ever wore. I never did have a pair of trousers with a belt. Overalls were the type with the suspenders on 'em. See a lotta people wearin' those today, quite a few.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: And all the miners, that's all they ever wore was overalls.

Mark: And cotton shirts, or wool shirts?

Thomas: Yeah. Both.

Mark: Yeah. Did you stay warm? 'Cause it was pretty cold in that country in the wintertime.

Thomas: Oh, boy, was it cold. Yes, it was cold.

Mark: Do your remember how cold it got?

Thomas: Oh, 'bout the same as it is here, I'd say.

Isabel: Well, sometimes it got below zero.

Thomas: Zero.

Isabel: Thirty below sometimes.

Thomas: Lotta snow, a lotta wind.

Mark: What were your chores?

Thomas: Oh, choppin' wood, mainly. Getting' the blocks and choppin' the wood. I did a lot of that.

Mark: Yes, I saw pictures of you as a young man and you had pretty ... you were pretty stout. You were pretty... you had a great build. Well, you're not bad now for your age.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: I mean you're what? Eighty ...

Thomas: ...seven.

Mark: What'd you say? Eighty-seven. You had a good build and I would imagine you worked ... when you were younger.

Thomas: Oh, yeah. We worked around the house. We all did. We had to. You ... we chopped wood, we raised pigs, we raised chickens. We went to the coal pile and where they discarded the coal that had rock on it, and we'd go with our little wagons and break the rock off of this and put the coal in the wagon and haul it home and put it in a shed so we didn't have to buy the coal. And we chopped a lotta wood and stacked it up and kept it through the winter, you know.

Mark: Where did you get the wood?

Thomas: Sawin' logs. We had ... everybody had a sawhorse. Everybody had a big 'ol saw. Two people had to saw these things and then chop it up.

Isabel: Sometimes they'd replace the railroad ties and ...

Thomas: Yeah, and get railroad ties. And we used to haul 'em, lotta coal miners used to bring these wooden blocks that long home from the mine. They had timber down in the mine and they'd have to cut the timber to make it the right height to support the roof. And then they'd have a chunk like that, or maybe longer than that, and they'd haul those home and saw 'em up and chop 'em up for firewood.

Mark: So how far did you have to go to school when you were a kid?

Thomas: Oh, it wasn't too far. We managed to walk to school.

Mark: No five miles through hip-deep snow.

Thomas: No, no. This was ...no we had, we had a school pretty close.

Mark: Yeah. And church, as well?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: So everything was pretty much right there in Cumberland.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah.

Mark: That was a company town, wasn't it?

Thomas: Yes. Company owned everything.

Mark: Did your mother buy at the company store?

Thomas: Yeah. [laughs] With what she could. When we first moved to Superior I thought Superior was a big city. I never seen a two-story building in my life. And they had a couple, two, three grocery stores there. And my mother went in to see the manager of this one store and asked him for credit so that she could buy some food for her family. And the guy turned her down. And, oh boy, I'll tell ya. I don't know how she made it in Superior.

Mark: The guy turned her down?

Thomas: Yeah. The manager of the store turned her down, an Italian guy, Bertagnoli.

Isabel: Oh, yeah. That was a, yeah, that wasn't a company store.

Thomas: No. That was a ...

Isabel: ...privately-owned store.

Mark: Hmm. Well, what was ... as I understood it you worked and then at the end of the month when you got paid you went to the company store and you paid off your bill.

Thomas: Um-hmm.

Mark: And you probably didn't have a whole lot left after that.

Thomas: No. Hell, no.

Mark: So you guys didn't have much money. Did she have a little can above the stove where she ....

Thomas: [laughs] No.

Mark: No?

Thomas: Oh, we'd ...we'd make money doin', like, the ironin' and stuff like that and didn't have to spend a heckuva lotta money for groceries because we raised a lotta that stuff. We always had a nice garden. My mother really enjoyed gardening. She raised turnips and cabbage and all that stuff and that all helped. And, like I say, we raised the pigs and raised a lamb and ....

Mark: Did you hunt? Or fish?

Thomas: No. Not 'til later on in life. My brother Ston was a hunter but, uh....

Mark: Did you guys eat wild game?

Thomas: Not a helluva lot, no.

Mark: Hmm. 'Cause I know some people in Wyoming survived ....

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: ... on wild game.

Thomas: I went huntin' there for several years when I come to Cheyenne. But she said, "You go out and kill it and you clean it and you cook it, you eat it. [laughs]. So that was the end of my huntin' days.

Mark: [laughs].

Isabel: There was only one time he brought home a young elk or something that was good; otherwise, if it wasn't properly treated or it was too old or it had a too strong a taste ...

Thomas: Well, that's what cured my ulcer was that ...

Isabel: That's right.

Thomas: ... one spike elk that I got.

Mark: What? I don't understand.

Thomas: [laughs]. It was just good meat without any fat on it or anything. I had a stomach ulcer that bothered me that ... then I had to watch my diet pretty close and that meat was really good. It was like veal.

Mark: When was this? When you were a kid you had an ulcer?

Isabel: No, no, that was after ....

Thomas: That was after I come back ...

Mark: Oh.

Thomas: First lived in Cheyenne.

Mark: OK. Hmm, what were some of your family traditions? I mean, holidays? How did you spend your time off?

Thomas: Mostly gettin' the whole family together and havin' a big dinner. That's about what it was. Christmas. Thanksgiving. All of the holidays we usually, the whole family usually got together. In Cumberland and in Superior. They'd all come to my mom's house. And she'd cook a big dinner, you know, all of the Slovenian dishes. It was just a royal get-together, just a wonderful time.

Mark: Did she enjoy that, too?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, she looked forward to it. She prepared for that for a week in advance, getting' all the stuff ready, her pies, and cakes, and crapas, and potitsa, and ...

Mark: Crapas? What were they again. What were the crapas?

Thomas: [laughs]

Isabel: Like a big doughnut ... without a hole.

Thomas: Like doughnut without a hole in 'em.

Isabel: Sweet dough.

Mark: Oh, kinda like my wife's mother used to make kolaches, "kolotchas".

Isabel: Yes, just like a sweet, like a big, sweet doughnut without a hole in it.

Thomas: Yeah, she'd dip 'em in sugar, like a sugar doughnut without a hole in it.

Mark: Yeah.

Isabel: And she'd have that with ham. It was good.

Mark: What did you ... when you all got together -- and I know that your whole family understands how important that family was to them, and how ...

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Mark: ... and how they treasure those memories. But what did you do when you got together?

Thomas: Just more or less, ...just laughed and joked and had a good time. That's about all, I'd say. Maybe have a glass of wine. We always made wine, too. And beer, too. [laughs] But that wasn't any part of it, just maybe have a glass of wine, that's about it. But just ... just being together. That's all it was.

Mark: Tellin' stories?

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: Yeah.

Thomas: And havin' a good laugh and tellin' stuff about their early childhood and stuff like that. That's mainly what it was.

Mark: Who made the wine and the beer?

Thomas: My mother did that, too. She knew how to make wine. She also made beer and she also made root beer for the kids. [laughs]

Mark: What kind of wine did she make?

Thomas: We'd get grapes every year. In Superior they'd have a grape car come in every fall. And boxes of grapes. And people had ordered these grapes and they'd put it on a truck and haul it to whoever ordered so many boxes of grapes. The Italians wee good for wine-making. They all made wine. And my mother used to sneak in there and make a ... we had a coupla barrels downstairs and you'd grind the grapes up and put 'em in a barrel and let it ferment.

Mark: Was it good?

Thomas: Oh, sure. Sure. Good 'ol "Dago Red" they called it.

Mark: [laughs] In those days "Dago" was not a

Thomas: Dago was "wop". Dago was a wop.

Isabel: They were called "wops" and dagoes" and nobody was offended.

Mark: Nobody was ....



Thomas: Without papers, that's what a wop was.

Mark: What'd they call the Slovenians?

Thomas: Bohunks.

Isabel: Bohunks.

Mark: Bohunks?

Thomas: Bohunks.

Mark: Bohemian-Hungarian?

Thomas: I don't know. Maybe that's what they were. [laughs]. I don't know. Bohunks [laughs again].

Mark: Gee. Gee. Who was the storyteller in your family?

Thomas: [draws a breath and exhales]

Mark: Who could tell the best stories?

Isabel: Julia and Mary.

Thomas: I guess Julia and Mary, the two oldest sisters. They could ya some good stories, that's for sure. [Isabel talking in background]

Mark: I wish I could have interviewed 'em.

Thomas: Oh, God, yeah.

Isabel: They'd have you laughing so hard sometimes.

Mark: Can you remember any? Stories?

Isabel: Oh, when they were young and workin' in Kemmerer. No, I don't, I can't, I wouldn't be able to say, tell.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Oh, they were really close, Julia and Mary were. Were really, really close. They ... I just don't remember any of the stories but there was a lot of them.

Mark: Now, when you moved ... how old were you when you moved to Superior?

Thomas: [purses his lips]

Mark: Didn't you say ...

Thomas: Let's see, I think I was in the third grade.

Mark: Right.

Thomas: So I was about nine, I guess..

Mark: Yeah. Now, where did you live? Did you ... was it a hard move for you to go from that four-room and the extra house to Superior to a different house?

Thomas: Well, by then, we just had about six of us together then: me and my two brothers and Dorothy, Margaret, Helen. About six, I guess. Six or seven of us ... lived in that house.

Mark: What house was that?

Thomas: In Superior.

Mark: Yeah, did the company get you a house?

Thomas: Yeah, there was a company house.

Mark: Oh, OK, that was U.P. ...

Thomas: When we first met ... went to Superior, they put ... they were different camps: A,B,C,D,E camps. "A" camp was the first camp ... that when you first come into Superior it was the first one that you went by and all the houses that were empty. I guess it was ... they used to have ...when Superior was really thrivin' these houses were all full of, probably a lot of Japanese workers, Chinese workers. And when we moved into those ... we come all the way from Cumberland and they put us, assigned us to a house in "A" Camp. And these houses didn't have any water, didn't have any electricity.

Mark: That was like goin' back in time.

Thomas: Yeah, they just moved us in there and, uh, we lived there for I don't know how long. But they were workin' to get water to the houses and they were workin' to get power. But when we first moved in there they didn't have either. So they used to come once a week with a horse and a wagon with a big tank on the wagon. And you'd got out all of your washtubs and all that stuff out. When this guy went by there then they'd fill your washtub and stuff with water. And that was gonna last you for a week until next week. And no electricity. You had to have kerosene lights. And I don't remember, exactly, how long that lasted but I would say it was probably a year or better before they got power into us and water into us.

Mark: Didn't you have a spring or a creek?

Thomas: No creek, nothing, no, it was a dry.

Mark: So you guys had to be more conservative on your water than we are today.

Thomas: Oh, sure. Oh, sure, yeah, hell yeah.

Mark: Your mother probably ... how did you guys bathe?

Thomas: In a tub on Saturday night. We all bathed in the same water. [laughs]. And we didn't get a change of water. There was a tub on Saturday night and girls went first and the boys went last.

Mark: [gasps] Oh! Where did you fit in that?

Thomas: I don't know. I don't remember. I must have been with the boys, I don't know.

Mark: [laughs] Oh. How did she keep the water warm?

Thomas: I don't know that, either. Probably had some on the stove and kept pourin' a little bit in it.

Mark: Yeah, I remember as a kid when we ran out of hot water my mother would boil water on the stove. And then my sister and I would be in the tub and she'd say, "Now get out of the way." And she'd pour that hot water in the tub.

Thomas: Yeah. It was like that. Yeah.

Mark: But by the time that last kid bathed that water wasn't too ...

Thomas: Yeah, it was pretty soapy.

Isabel: [laughs] Soapy and dirty.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, I would say.

Thomas: But every Saturday night, boy, never miss. Saturday night was bath night. I used to hate that, too. I didn't like that at all.

Mark: Why?

Thomas: [laughs] I just didn't like bathin' in a tub. I didn't like takin' a bath, period.

Mark: [laughs]. Oh, my gosh..

Thomas: Were out there scroungin' around in the dirt all week long and then have to go in there and ... oh, God, I tell you.

Mark: Why Saturday night, though?

Thomas: I don't know.

Mark: Did you ... 'cause ... well, maybe you went to church on Sunday, right?

Thomas: Maybe that it was it. Get ready for church on Sunday, I don't know.

Mark: Did you go to church on Sunday regularly, then ... in Superior?

Thomas: No, hell, I wasn't a churchgoing member.

Mark: You mean the kids had their choice? They didn't have to go to church.

Thomas: No. We ... no. And my mother didn't go either. Hell she was too busy to go to church.

Mark: Did you say ....

Thomas: This wasn't a churchgoin' family. None of us went to church.

Mark: That's unusual to me.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Were your neighbors the same way?

Isabel: I'm not sure there was a church in Superior in those days.

Thomas: Oh, there was one in Superior all the time, up on Second B up there.

Isabel: It was built then?

Thomas: Catholic church. The priest used to come from Rock Springs and have a mass every Sunday.

Isabel: I know that but I'm wondering when you were...

Mark: Yeah. Well, did you have family prayers?

Thomas: [takes a deep breath]. Not that I remember. Nope.

Mark: Did you say “grace”?

Thomas: Nope. Not that, either.

Mark: You didn’t say grace before meals?

Thomas: No, I don’t remember doin’ that.

Mark: You were never taught “Now I lay me down to sleep?”

Thomas: No, I never did. Nope.

Mark: Interesting. Interesting. Well, how do you feel about it today? Are your religious today?

Thomas: Well, I believe, yeah, but we kinda fell away from the church. We were pretty good about goin’ to Mass for a long, long time. And then when I got that job and did that travelin’ job I kinda fell away from it and we just never did go back. I think we should go back but ....

Mark: How were your ... What were some of your neighbors like in Superior? Can you describe that life, that early life in Superior?

Thomas: I think they, more or less, all of ‘em, kind of lived about the same life. I, uh....

Mark: Can you remember your neighbors?

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Who were they?

Thomas: Well, she was one of the neighbors .

Mark: The Riccis [he pronounces it “Reechees”]

Isabel and Thomas: Rizzis [they pronounce it “Rizzees”]

Mark: [repeats the name but pronounces it correctly, like Thomas and Isabel] Oh, I’m sorry.

Isabel: After he moved up to, on “C” Hill from “A” Camp, yeah. Next to us.

Mark: Oh, you moved?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Why did you guys move?

Thomas: Well ... mainly because of the conditions in "A" Camp. They didn't ... When the house opened up in Superior they were pretty nice. They were fixed up pretty nice and they had water, and electric lights and all that.

Mark: Yeah. Yeah. So there were the Rizzis. Next door neighbors?

Thomas: Yeah, across the street from us.

Mark: Did you know Isabel then as a kid?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK.

Thomas: Knew her for practically all my life up there.

Mark: You know, I met a guy on a plane not too long when I went up to Alaska on a fishing trip this summer and I said ... he said he had been married 68 years. Now you guys have been how long ?

Thomas: 64.

Mark: And he said he knew his wife in grade school and in high school and ... he said he just figured she was the one he was supposed to marry.

Thomas: [laughs] Well, that wasn't exactly the way it was with us. She, uh, she lived across the street and we just never did get together until after ... until during the war.

Mark: Now, tell me the truth, Tom. Was she a pain in your neck or was she just somebody you didn't pay any attention to, as a kid?

Thomas: I don't think I paid attention to her. The only ... I paid attention to her when we were in high school but she didn't ... she wouldn't give me the time of day.

[Thomas and Mark both laugh]

Thomas: Not until I got the wings and the bars on my Air Force uniform.

Mark: That made a difference.

Thomas: That's the truth. She can't argue about that.

Isabel: Then I saw some potential.

Thomas: No, we wrote letters when I was in the service. I don't know who started that. I guess I did, I don't know.

Mark: Now, lets go back a little bit before we go forward. What school did you go to in Superior?

Thomas: Superior High School.

Mark: No, I mean from the third grad on.

Thomas: There was a school down what they call "White City" downtown. That's where I went to school, I think in the third, probably the fourth grade.

Mark: Why did they call it "White City"?

Thomas: Beats the hell out of me. It wasn't white, that's for sure.

Mark: [laughs].

Thomas: I don't know who give it that name.

Isabel: The company didn't own that part of Superior.

Mark: Oh, the company didn't own that part.

Thomas: It was South Superior. That's what it was, and I don't know where they got the name from ... "White City" ... but it's South Superior and North Superior.

Mark: Right. Was this a brick building? A shack? Where you went to school?

Thomas: It was a wooden building, wood frame.

Mark: One story?

Thomas: Uh, it was, I think there was two stories in that one down in South Superior if I remember right. I remember the stairs in there. I think it was two-story.

Mark: Were there a lotta kids?

Thomas: Yeah, it was full.

Mark: All the grades were together ... in that one building?

Thomas: First through sixth.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: What was that like? ... I mean, how did the teacher teach? All six grades

Thomas: Different rooms, different rooms.

Isabel: They each had their own teacher.

Thomas: Yeah, you had your own teacher and you had your own room.

Mark: Do you remember some of those days, some of the teachers?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, yeah ...remember most of 'em.

Mark: Who were they?

Thomas: [draws a breath] Well, third grade was Miss Brown. And fourth grade was Mrs. Farrar who used to hit you on top of the head with a big ring on her finger. [laughs]

Isabel: She was up in the one I went to. But that wasn't downtown, though.

Mark: And then after that?

Thomas: After that? Went up to the Superior schools in North Superior. And they were one through six, too, and I went through the fifth and sixth grade there, I think. Fifth grade was Mrs. Mosier and sixth grade was Mr. Thomas. Two good teachers.

Mark: What do you remember about 'em?

Thomas: Mrs. Mosier? Really strict teacher but excellent. You learned stuff from her. And Mr. Thomas was the same way. He was the principal of the school.

Isabel: Grade school.

Thomas: Hmm?

Isabel: Principal of the grade school.

Thomas: Yeah, principal of the grade school up North Superior.

Mark: What about ... did you ever get in trouble?

Thomas: Oh, I get in trouble every once in a while, yeah.

Mark: Tell me about that.



Isabel: They might put him in jail.

Thomas: No, I never did go to jail. Pretty close one time but ....

Mark: You've gotta tell me about these things. These are fun things..

Thomas: Well, uh, the only way that I could get any money in Superior was to sell copper, and aluminum and brass and get about two cents a pound for it. And me and my next door neighbor we used to go to the Union Pacific shops and storage houses where they threw away their scrap metal and wire and stuff. And we'd go with a gunny sack and fill it up with copper and take it to this guy that was buildin' a big block house up on top of the hill there. And he would buy it, pay us for this stuff. And we did that for a long time. We made enough money to go to the movies. And, in fact, it got so trusting ...he got so trusting with us that he would pay us in advance. And the movies, I think, were a quarter to go to the movie, or fifteen cents or something. But he would pay and we'd go to the movie and then on our way home from the movie we'd go into what they'd call the barns down there where they kept all this copper wire and stuff like that. And we'd go in there and fill our gunny sack full and take it up to him and drop it off.

Well, one time we were in one of the buildings gettin' warm ... it was cold and we went into one of the buildings that belonged to the Union Pacific Coal Company. It was a pumphouse. We went in there because it was nice and warm in there, and we got caught by one of the supervisors for the Union Pacific Coal Company. And he turned us in. And, uh, we went to school the following day and right in the middle of one of our sessions in school over the loudspeaker come: "Will Thomas Fabian and Paul Nickcich, would you come to the superintendent's office? So I knew somethin' was goin' on there. And I knew what happened. And we went up there, and here there was the sheriff there. And he was a big, stropping guy, he was an Italian guy and everybody was scared to death of the guy. He was the sheriff. Alphonse Bertagnoli his name was. And he was up in the office with the superintendent of schools. And they asked us about stealin' that copper. And, hell, I couldn't do anything. We had to admit it. And then they said, "We don't know what we're gonna do with you." And so, "I think I'm gonna...." They said, "I think we'll let you go see the superintendent of the mines."

And so we went to the superintendent of the mines. And, boy, he chewed me out. He was the one that was so good to my mother and family. And, boy, he chewed me out. He says, "I've known your mother all your life and she worked so hard to keep you goin' and now you're gonna give her a lotta trouble by goin' out and stealin' copper and ...."[laughs] Boy, he made me feel bad. I was really cryin' over it. And the -who was it? -- I guess Swans [?] was with us there. The sheriff was with us there, too. Says, "Well", he says, "I guess there's only one thing to do is put you in jail for a coupla days." And, "Oh", I said, "Boy, you can't do that." And, "Oh, please don't do that. Please don't do that." And so they let us off but we had to go see the sheriff once a month, I guess, for about six months and report to him. We were kind of on ....

Mark: Probation.

Thomas: Probation yeah.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: That still didn't stop us. We still stole copper. [laughs]

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: Oh, gosh. Twenty-five, thirty cents back in those days was good money. Enough to go to the movies. I was crazy about goin' to the movies. Oh, I loved the movies, yeah. Especially those cowboy shows: Buck Jones and Tom Mix and Bob Steele and [laughs] all those good cowboys.

Mark: Hopalong Cassidy?

Thomas: Yeah. Well, even further back than that.

Isabel: Only trouble is you had to commit a crime to go see the good guys.

Mark: He had to commit a crime to go see the good guys?

Isabel: Well, yeah, the movies, the good cowboys.

Mark: Oh.

Isabel: It taught him a lesson.

Thomas: And then we ... another thing we used to do was, her brother and me when we built that Model T Ford, we had to put oil and gas in the doggone thing. So we went to the company store and we got the used oil, of the oil that was drained out of cars and put in a barrel down there and we used that in our Model T. But we had to go get gas. So we had a hose and a can [laughs] and ... and we ... and we went ...every time they had a dance up at the school or somethin' goin' on up at the school we went up and we replenished our supply of gas by siphoning out of the tanks of the cars parked out there at night.

Mark: Did you ever get caught?

Thomas: We never did get caught doin' that, though.

Mark: Who had to do the siphoning? ... the suckin' on the tube?

Thomas: Oh, we all did that, yeah.

Mark: [draws a breath] Man, oh man!

Thomas: It wasn't hard to do. It worked real easy. You could get ... you could drain a gallon of gas out of there in no time at all.

Mark: Well, you know, it's a useful thing to know when you're somewhere where you need gas.

Thomas: Yeah, you ain't a-kiddin'.

Mark: What did your mother think of this when you got caught on you ....?

Thomas: My mother didn't know anything about it. I don't think she ever found out about me almost goin' to jail. I don't think she knew about it, anyway.

Mark: You sure?

Thomas: Yeah, I'm pretty sure she didn't. I didn't tell her, I know that.

Mark: What was ... How did she punish you when you did wrong?

Thomas: My mother didn't ... she didn't do any punishing. My brother, George, kinda took over after my dad died. He was the oldest brother. He musta been ... oh, I guess he was about fifteen when my dad died. And I think ... he went to see my dad on his deathbed. My dad requested it. He wanted to talk to my brother, George. And I guess he told George that he was gonna have to take over the family, now. And he did. My mother raised all of us to go through high school except him and he was offered a job to work in the mines when he was seventeen years old and went to work in the mines. So he missed graduating from high school. He was the only one that didn't graduate from the high school.

Mark: Did that disappoint your mother?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Everybody else graduated from high school?

Mark: Yeah ... yeah.

Thomas: Did anybody go on to college?

Thomas: No, none of us. We couldn't afford that. Hell, I couldn't afford to go to the dentist, even. I had rotten teeth from in my mouth all my high school days.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: Oh, boy, I had bad teeth. Toothaches? Oh! Boy!

Mark: Well, didn't you get 'em fixed in the service?

Thomas: Yeah. Well, I got 'em fixed before I went into the service because I was afraid I was gonna wash out if I didn't have good teeth. So when I enlisted down in Salt Lake I went to a dentist. And he says, "I can fix you up for a hundred dollars." So I wired home. I told my mother I needed a hundred dollars to fix my teeth. And she scraped up a hundred bucks someplace -- I don't know where but --- but I got a partial and I got a bridge and I got ... pulled eight teeth that were [laughs] the gums were growing over these teeth and they had to dig 'em out ... all for a hundred bucks.

Mark: But in those days that was tough ....

Thomas: It was a lotta money, yeah.

Mark: How did she ... how did she ever afford it?

Thomas: I don't know. She had a little sock put away. She ....

Mark: You think?

Thomas: Yeah. She had, probably coupla hundred dollars in it all the time. Yeah.

Mark: Did she help out the other kids like that, too?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Hell, none of us went to the dentist that I know. I really had ... I was the one that really had bad teeth. Bad teeth. Hell, we never brushed 'em or cleaned 'em or nothing. Stuff that we couldn't afford to have.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: And there wasn't a dent ... well there was a dentist in town but I never ... you couldn't afford the two dollars to get your tooth filled. It was that bad. It was that bad.

Mark: What about the doctor. Did you ever have to go to the doctor?

Thomas: Well, he was a company doctor. You could go there and the company paid him.

Mark: And you didn't have to pay.

Thomas: No.

Mark: Did you guys .....

Thomas: No, you'd just go there and if there was somethin' was wrong with you, you'd go and sit in the waiting room and he'd call you in and find out what was wrong with ya.

Mark: Did you have to go, ever?

Thomas: To the doctor?

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Yeah, couple times, couple times that I remember.

Mark: Yeah. Huh. Well did you ... you had to get inoculations surely as a kid. You had to have your smallpox and measles. Huh? No?

Thomas: I don't remember takin' any shots.

Isabel: Oh, yeah, I got the ... I guess we did, 'cause I've got the scar for ... vaccination.

Mark: OK. Well, boy, this has been a fun and I haven't even gotten into your military career but.... Do you suppose what we can do is finish up here a little on your younger life, and can I come back and talk about your military?

Thomas: Oh, sure.

Mark: OK. Let's ... go back now to junior high. You talked about the fifth and sixth grade teachers but how about seventh, eighth, ninth and on up? Did you go to a different school because grades one through six were all in that one.

Thomas: Yeah. Then right next to it was the high school, seven through twelve.

Mark: Superior had a high school?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Hmm.

Thomas: Yeah. Oh, sure. Superior Dragons – football, basketball ....

Mark: The dragons?

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: Um-hmm.

Mark: Why did they name 'em the Dragons?

Thomas: I don't know. Somebody give it that name.

Mark: What were your school colors?

Thomas: Purple and white.

Mark: Purple and white Dragons.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: I've got one downstairs ... that we got at one of our reunions.

Mark: What's that?

Isabel: A dragon.

Thomas: A dragon.

Mark: A dragon?

Isabel: Made out of wood, yeah.

Thomas: Go get it, Isabel, please.

Isabel: If I can find it.

Thomas: [chuckles]

Mark: So what was junior high like for you? 'Cause that's always a tough time in a kid's life.

Thomas: I guess junior high back in those days was seven and eight grade, I think. That's why the high school was nine through twelve.

Mark: That's what it was for me.

Thomas: It didn't seem like it was too bad. It wasn't much of a transition, I didn't think. We always thought it would be. We was kinda scared to go to high school but, uh, it wasn't bad. We had wonderful teachers in Superior. Real ... and I think they made it easy on the kids. We had some of 'em that were kinda nutty, coupla teachers that I remember that were really bad.

Isabel: [laughs] We have great reunions.

Mark: OK. Here, Isabel just brought in the dragon. It's a wooden, uh, you know, cut with a little jigsaw. It's a wooden dragon on a little ... wooden pedestal and he's painted purple and white. And this is the Superior Dragon.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK. [laughs out loud]

Mark: OK. Well ...how were you in school as a student?

Thomas: Oh, I think I was a good student. I wasn't the smartest one but I got good grades, yeah. It took up lotta good subjects. I was in the advanced math class and, uh, what the heck was the other one that we used to have in Superior? [he asks Isabel].

Isabel: Geometry.

Thomas: There was solid geometry and advanced math and a couple of those. I was in that class along with about ten other students.

Mark: You were good in Math.

Thomas: Yeah, I think I was.

Mark: What were your worst subjects?

Thomas: Well, I don't think I had a bad subject. English, probably. But I had a good teacher there ... a really tough teacher but she was really good. She was really hard on some kids. If you were a pet like I was you were OK but if she didn't like you, man, she made it tough. Miss. Coffman, her name was.

Mark: [chuckles].

Thomas: [turning to Isabel] You had Miss Coffman, didn't you?

Isabel: Yeah. She was tough.

Thomas: But she was an excellent English teacher.

Mark: Did she ... uh, did she make you read a lot?

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Mark: Did you read some of the classics?

Isabel: Yeah.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah.

Mark: Did you ... what do you remember?

Thomas: Oh, hell, what .... I don't remember what they were but we had to report on 'em, I know that.

Isabel: Shakespeare and all that. We had ... and poetry. She ...we went through all that, yeah.

Mark: Well, are you still a good reader?

Thomas: Me? Uh, not so much lately 'cause I ... I love to read. I love to read books and everything and ... but I can't retain it. I can read a page, uh, a chapter one day, and overnight I'll have to read that chapter over again because I just don't ... I just don't remember it.

Mark: Well, as a kid didn't you have to memorize some things?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, well I'm talkin' about now. I'm gettin' ... I'm gettin' a little bit, uh, [laughs] what do ya call it?

Mark: Well, you ....

Isabel: Forgetfulness?

Thomas: Yeah. It's really bad forgetfulness.

Mark: Well, it doesn't seem like it, talkin' to ya. You've got good memories.

Thomas: Yeah, well, ... but, boy, around here I'm really bad now.

Mark: But there ....

Thomas: Can't remember anything.

Mark: When you're .... They say that if you memorize things that it trains your mind. You have to force yourself to memorize things and that trains your mind as you..... I know this, 'cause as I get older I have the same problem. Everybody does. And I'm 66. But they say there's certain exercises you can do to improve your memory. Well, anyway, goin' back to school, were you involved in sports? Can you tell me something about sports in those days?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. I was in football, basketball ...that's in ... track, in high school. I consider myself a pretty good athlete. In fact one of the guys that graduated from Superior went on to be a coach in Jackson, Wyoming. He told one of my nephews that he thought I was the best athlete to come out of Superior. I didn't think so but .... [laughs] No, I didn't think I was. I just ....he said I ....

Isabel: The baseball team.

Thomas: He said, "Oh, yeah", he says. "That's right", he says. I says, "Well, I didn't have the real talent of an athlete," I says, "but there was nobody that played harder than I did." And I really believe that. I played ... I played to win. I played awfully hard no matter what the



sport was. I played ... I played my guts out. And then after high school I played for the Superior baseball team. And we had a great baseball team back there. It was a good baseball team. And I managed to make that team when I was just 17 years old, I think, seventeen. Just got out of high school and I managed to be a player on that team.

Mark: What position?

Thomas: I played first base and out in the outfield. But first base I ended up at. I could hit good. I could run fast. On Labor Days we ... they used to have races, you know. Labor Day was a big day in Superior. That was the day ... what? ... it wasn't ... uh .... Yeah, Labor Day was ... for the miners was really the biggest celebration they had. And they used to run races, all kinds of races. And they had the -what was it? - it was the race that was, uh, anybody could get into it. And they paid ten bucks to the winner. I used to win that. Made, maybe, twenty, thirty kids run it.

Mark: How far?

Thomas: Hundred yards.

Mark: And you used to win it?

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: They had races for women. And they had, uh, climbed the greasy pole ... and all kinds of things ...

Thomas: Oh, geez, my sisters ... my sisters used to go down there and win money, win, you know, five, six, seven dollars winnin' racin', come home and turn all that money in to my mother .... see that's the way they did.

Mark: And you did the same thing..

Thomas: yeah, yeah. I'd win the big prize, though. I think that was, that race was called - what the heck was it -- all comers, all, uh, whoever wants to race ....

Mark: How do you account for that? Did you get that from your mom or your dad? That ability. Or was it just hard work?

Thomas: No, I think it was ...probably both. I think, uh, my brothers were pretty good athletes.

Mark: Oh, were they?

Thomas: My sisters were good athletes, too.

Mark: George was a good athlete?

Thomas: George was a good athlete. Ston was an excellent athlete. He was a good baseball player.

Mark: Did you guys play on the same team?

Thomas: Yes.

Mark: What positions did they play?

Thomas: Oh, uh, my brother Stan played, uh, he was a catcher or shortstop. And my brother, George, played in the outfield. On Labor Day they used to pay a team to come in and play us. And, uh, they got one from, out of Salt Lake called the Denver-Rio Grande team that one year. And they had a coupla professional athletes on that team. Coupla pitchers that went to the big leagues. And we beat 'em. We had a real good team. We claimed the state championship that one year. Of course, the Cheyenne team here – I think it was Cheyenne Eagles or something, they were. They claimed the state championship but they wouldn't play us. They refused to play us. [laughs] So we laid claim to the championship that year because they wouldn't play. They never did play us. I think we coulda beat 'em, myself ... pretty easy.

Mark: Because you guys were older or what? Or you just had a good team.

Thomas: Well, the coal miners, you know, they really got a ... they really enjoyed baseball ... the coal mining ... then the fans. We had wonderful fans in Superior. We played Sunday baseball and, boy, they'd come out to the field and honk their horns, you know, and have a good time.

Isabel: Dirt field.

Thomas: And on Labor Day was a big day because we'd hire a good team to play us two days.

Isabel: Your uniforms.

Thomas: Yeah, oh, yeah, I should tell you about the uniforms we got. One of the managers' wives saw an article somewhere in the paper or somethin' or in the want ads or somethin'. They said, it said that "New York Yankee uniforms, used uniforms". So she sent in and, by gosh, they sent us the uniforms. She paid for 'em but they sent us New York Yankee uniforms. And inside of the pants of these uniforms they had their names sewed in there.

Mark: Really!

Thomas: Babe Ruth.

Mark: No.

Thomas: Lou Gehrig. All of that one Yankee team that was ... And what did we do with those uniforms? They had "NY" on the deal, here. We took those off and put an "S" on there for Superior. And we had to, we had to send ... well, my, I think my aunt, she was ... she sewed things. The uniform I got, I forget who it was but it was one of the best players on that team. Had the name sewed in there and they had the name sewed in the shirt and in the cap. And, uh, anyway, we had to make those uniforms fit. Seemed like they were awfully big. And so the tailors shortened 'em up and did all that to 'em ... ruined 'em, really. Because if you had that Lou Gehrig or Babe Ruth right now, today ....

Isabel: We'd all be millionaires.

Thomas: You could name your price for it.

Mark: Did you keep your uniform?

Thomas: I don't know what happened to it. I don't know what happened to it. Nobody kept it.

Mark: What name was inside of your uniform?

Thomas: I don't remember but I know when they got 'em they said, "Look at this! Babe Ruth. Look at this one: Lou Gehrig. [laughs]

Mark: Superior, Wyoming.

Isabel: Yeah.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: Who was the coach?

Thomas: Uh, a guy by the name of Tom Lavery. He was a coal miner.

Mark: Tom Lavery?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: How do you spell that?

Thomas: L-A-V-E-R-Y.

Mark: Was he a good player himself?

Thomas: Uh, I don't remember him playin' much but he was a good manager. He knew his baseball. Alec Clark was another manager. He was a coal miner. But at this last reunion we

went to the breakfast on a Sunday and this Tom Lavery's son was there. And that kid remembered all kinds of things about that baseball team. And it was his mother that ordered these uniforms. And he says, "Boy," he says, "We coulda all been millionaires now if we'd a just saved those and let 'em be like they were. You know, don't change anything. The cap we didn't change. It had, the cap had a "NY" on the front. Fact, I got that picture somewhere. Isn't it handy there, Isabel, someplace? I'm not on that picture buy my brother Stan is.

Mark: Now, when you say these guys were good coaches, were they technically good coaches, or did they just push ya?

Thomas: Oh, just, uh, they ... you know, they weren't in a league or anything like that. They didn't take lessons as managers or anything like that. They just knew baseball from playin' it. See? [pointing to a photograph] Those are New York Yankees uniforms there. [laughs]

Mark: Oh, OK. Omigosh. I'm lookin' at a picture here, in an 8 by 10 frame – looks like a 5 by 7 – and there's "New York" on the caps. There's New York on the caps!

Thomas: Yeah, that's right. That's the only thing we didn't change.

Mark: I'll bet you got a lot of questions about that.

Thomas: [laughs]

Mark: This one guy, coupla guys don't have that, or several guys don't have New York caps. Which one is you in this picture?

Thomas: I'm not in that but my brother, Stan, is ... right there. [sounds like he leans forward to show Mark]

Mark: Stan is the second from the left.

Thomas: Yeah, that was ... I got one, I got a picture of me in one ...in that uniform, somewhere, all by myself but I don't know where in the heck it's at now. It's ....

Mark: I see somethin' in the background that looks like a water tank. I see a hill....

Thomas: Oh, that's Copenhagen Tipple, coal mine tipple.

Mark: Was there just one baseball park in town?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK.

Thomas: Yeah. It wasn't grass. It was dirt. We had a screen backstop. We didn't have any fence around it or anything like that. It was a ...

Thomas: That's a good story there [not sure to what he is referring]

Mark: Yeah, that's a great story. Uh, there was no fence. So what about homeruns? How did you get a homerun?

Thomas: Well, you ... if you hit a ball in between the fielders it went into a crick [creek] and that was a homerun. [both Thomas and Mark laugh] But it was a nice field. It was really well-kept. We drug it all the time with a drag and kept the infield nice and smooth.

Mark: So there weren't any bad hops?

Thomas: No, and that's where we ... the high school played their football games, is on that dirt. Same field. Yeah.

Mark: You didn't play on grass?

Thomas: No. Hell, I didn't ... there was one team that had grass, I think, and that was Green River. If I remember right when I was playing football in high school.

Mark: That was even worse than Astroturf.

Thomas: [laughs] It was hard.

Mark: Oh, man.

Thomas: I'll tell ya that. It was hard.

Mark: Now you played football, too.

Thomas: Yeah, oh yeah.

Mark: So, what position?

Thomas: I played a tight end.

Mark: How big were ya?

Thomas: I weighed around 165-70 pounds, I guess.

Mark: How tall were you?

Thomas: Oh, 5-11, I guess. 5-10 ... 5-11.

Mark: You were a tight end, 5-11, 165.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: That would be probably not even a very heavy wide-receiver today.

Thomas: No, I wouldn't.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Well, a guy back in those days, if you were 170, 175 pounds you were a pretty big guy for high school. There wasn't too many of those.

Mark: There weren't many fat guys.

Thomas: No, there wasn't too many guys that were 200. I only know of one on our team that was 200.

Mark: Well, when you went into the service weren't you, like, 180 or something like that?

Thomas: Yeah, about that. 'Bout the same as I am right now.

Mark: Yeah. So in football you were a tight end. If you ran, if you were so fast why weren't you a running back?

Thomas: I don't know. You'd have to ask the coach. I wanted to play in the backfield but he [laughs] ... he wasn't much of a coach. He wasn't a very good coach, I didn't think so, anyway. Lotta people didn't think so. He didn't have the right guys in the right place.

Mark: Yeah. What kind of a record did you have?

Thomas: Not a very good one. The only team we could beat was Rawlins. [both laugh] Rock Springs used to beat the hell out of us. And Green River used to beat the hell out of us and....

Mark: Well, you had all those big Italian kids, and the ....

Thomas: Yeah ....

Mark: And the Polish guys.

Thomas: Well, we didn't have very good coaching though. I think that was the problem.

Mark: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: Rock Springs had good coaches.

Mark: Now in those days, Tom, how did you get from game to game? Did you ... did you have a school bus?

Thomas: School bus, yeah.

Mark: And the roads were all dirt roads?

Thomas: No, at that time they were paved.

Mark: Were they?

Thomas: Yep. Oh, when we first got to Superior the road from the Highway 8-- Interstate 80 now – up the canyon for about seven miles – I guess they called it “Horsethief Canyon”, that was dirt. And the dust was about that deep.

Mark: A foot deep.

Thomas: [laughs]. It was a mess when you went up there but they paved it, too, later on. Wasn't too long after that they paved it.

Mark: And then, so you rode to these games in what they call the yellow dogs.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: Are these ....?

Thomas: Yeah. Now, here. Here's, here's the good team. This is me and my two brothers on this team.

Mark: This is a 5 by 7 and I don't see many Yankee caps on this.

Thomas: No, these were, these were uniforms that we had made after that.

Mark: Where are you in this picture? On the ...is this you ... far left?

Thomas: Yeah, that's right. Right there. Now, let's see, my brother Stan ... my brother, George is right behind me and then my brother, Stan, is second one from me.

Mark: OK, so ...

Thomas: And here's good picture of the three of us.

Mark: ... third from the left is Stan. And then George is behind ya.

Thomas: ...if you'd be interested in this. [shows Mark another photo] That's a senator from Wyoming.

Mark: I wondered about that. Is that Joseph O'Mahoney?

Thomas: Yeah ... that's him.

Mark: OK, let me describe this for the tape. There's four ... there's five people in this picture. Your mother's in the middle.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: With, I don't know why, a sombrero, a Mexican sombrero..

Thomas: It was hot in the sunshine. [laughs]

Mark: And then standing to her right, at left in the picture here is Joseph C. O'Mahoney who was a senator, long-time senator from Wyoming. To the left of him in this picture ...

Thomas: That's my brother, Stan.

Mark: 'Scuse me. To his right, but to our left that's your brother, Stan. Now to the right of your ... to the left of your mother is....

Thomas: That's me.

Mark: That's you.

Thomas: And then that's my brother, George, there .

Mark: And that's your brother, George, which is on our right. Your mother looks so proud in that picture.

Thomas: Oh, she was proud. Yeah. She was proud of us boys.

Mark: What was the occasion? Can you describe that occasion?

Thomas: I think that' probably one of those Labor Day celebrations.

Mark: I looked at that and I said to myself ... I saw this last night and I said, "That's Joe O'Mahoney!"

Thomas: Uh, the reason Joe O'Mahoney was a good friend of mine has to do with my military career but I'll tell ya about that when ya get into the military business.

Mark: OK. OK. Uh, what kind of a guy was he ... Joe O'Mahoney?

Thomas: Oh, he was a heckuva nice guy. Yeah, he ... I got several letters from him and....



Mark: Do you still have 'em?

Thomas: Oh, no.

Mark: You didn't keep any of that old stuff?

Thomas: No.

Mark: Did you guys keep your letters between each other, you and Isabel?

Isabel: I just got rid of 'em.

Thomas: I don't know. Did you ...

Isabel: I had 'em all, yeah. And then I ....

Mark: What did you do with 'em?

Isabel: I ... [her breath stops] burned it.

Mark: Noooooo!

Thomas: [laughs]

Mark: You burned the letters? Oh, Isabel.

Thomas: I think she kept 'em for a long time, though, didn't you? You, ....

Isabel: Yeah, I just burned 'em last year. [laughs]

Mark: Why did you do that?

Isabel: I didn't want anyone else to read 'em.

Mark: Oh, OK. Well .... You know ... Well, OK. So we've covered sports, uh .... Were there any ... did you ever have any scouts come look at your teams?

Thomas: Not that I know of, no.

Mark: You were probably so far out of the way nobody knew....

Thomas: Yeah, that's right.

Mark: ... where Superior was.

Thomas: That's right.

Mark: You know?

Thomas: But I think we, uh, I think we had some players on that team that probably coulda' went up in the pros.

Mark: What about yourself?

Thomas: They were that good.

Mark: What about you?

Thomas: Hmmm. I coulda' probably played in Class Triple-A ball or Double-A ball. I think I could've.

Mark: Were your ambitions in that direction?

Thomas: Oh, they were but we didn't have much of a chance, you know? We .... Baseball season was so short back in those ... You played three months here and that was 'bout it. You didn't get any good training or anything like that. My two sons were good baseball players, too.

Mark: Joe was? And Brent was?

Thomas: Brent was an excellent player. He got looked at by Pittsburgh Pirate scouts one time.

Mark: That does make you think that you could've gone further in baseball.

Thomas: I think I could've. Maybe not to the Majors but I think I coulda' gone to, maybe, Double-A or Triple-A.

Mark: Well, you never know.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: What was your batting average?

Thomas: I ... I was the leading hitter, average. I wasn't the biggest homerun hitter but I was a pretty good hitter. I hit a homerun once in a while.

Mark: Do you remember what you average was?

Thomas: I hit 400 one season. One of my pictures I had, on the back of ...written my average. I had a batting average over 400.

Mark: That's incredible. Do you remember ...you know, I remember back to my baseball career and I can remember, almost remember, specific times at bat when I did really well. Do you remember ....

Thomas: Oh, I can remember that, too.

Mark: Can you?

Thomas: [laughs] Yeah.

Mark: Give me a couple ... just a couple of 'em, just a little flavor.

Thomas: Well, lessee. On a ... during my league play ... I guess, oh ... what I did wasn't all that spectacular but it won the game for us. It was during league play and we were playin' the Hanno-Elmo Merchants. And they had ... they were loaded with all the University of Wyoming players on their team. And they were leadin' the league. And they come to Superior and we ... they played us. We were playin' for the league at that time and, uh, the score was 0-0-0 all the way up to the ninth inning. And the bottom of the ninth inning our pitcher got on base. He was a real good athlete and got around to third base. And they ...we were gonna try to squeeze him in and I was the one that was at bat. And I laid a perfect bunt down ... and scored and won the game, one to nothing. I remember that more than any other ... hittin' homeruns or anything else. I remember that one because it was such an important game and it was such a great game, one to nothin' ...and we got it in the bottom of the ninth.

Mark: Yeah, was that a home game?

Thomas: Yeah. Big crowd we had there. And someplace I got a picture of that scoreboard. I have a picture of the scoreboard and we used to have kids keep score on that scoreboard and all of them zeroes on there and then one on the bottom of the ninth.

Mark: Wow, what a memory. What league was that?

Thomas: I don't know what they called the league. It was all the coal mines: Superior, Reliance, Rock Springs, Green River. Evanston was in that league. Kemmerer was in that league.

Mark: Winton? Did Winton have a team?

Thomas: No, Reliance had ... well, it was Reliance-Winton.

Mark: Oh, OK.

Thomas: Yeah. Both of 'em together. Then they had a ... a black team from Rock Springs.

Mark: Did they?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Tell me about those guys.

Thomas: [laughs] We had some good competition against those guys. Hack Carter ... I don't know whether you ever heard of Hack Carter from Rock Springs. He was an excellent baseball player. I think he coulda went up to the pros somewhere. Real good player, nice fella, nice guy. We used to beat the hell out of them all the time.

Mark: The Black team?

Thomas: Yeah. My brother, Stan, could hit that Black pitcher. We called him .. we said that he hit the pitcher. His name was Marshall Robinson ... with the Black pitcher. We called, we told Ston that's his cousin 'cause he hit him so hard all the time.

Mark and Thomas laugh together.

Thomas: Yeah, that's your cousin, Ston. [laughs again]

Mark: Oh, boy. Well, were you guys number one in the league?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. We won the league.

Mark: And especially when you beat this Hanna-Elmo team.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. They, like I say, they were, they had the whole University of Wyoming baseball team over there. They give 'em a job in the summer just to play baseball with 'em, see? Oh, we did that, too. We had, we hired a few guys from Arkansas that were real good players. Give 'em a job in Superior and they'd play baseball for us in the summer.

Mark: That's what they call "ringers".

Thomas: Yeah. It was kinda, it was kind of a semi-pro league, really.

Mark: Yeah. Did you play anybody from out of state? Like Salt Lake City or Denver?

Thomas: Just on Labor Day, that special day.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: They'd come in and play us. And there was a traveling team comin' around once in a while. We had the Oklahoma Sooners come in one time. They called them the Oklahoma Sooners, a bunch of young kids from Oklahoma. We beat them. And then they had a team ... a Japanese team that come in. From, uh ...they were tourin' the country and we beat them. I

remember that Japanese team, that catcher and pitcher there talkin' back and forth in Japanese. [laughs] That was quite a ... quite a experience. Those guys were good, too. They were good players.

Mark: Were they?

Thomas: Yeah, they were really good players.

Mark: Well, did anybody ever beat you?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, there was teams that beat us. Team from Rock Springs used to do it once in a while. But mainly we'd come out on top. We had a good team.

Mark: Yeah. I remember when I was in college, Tom, we used to play the penitentiary. I went to Western State in Gunnison? And because the penitentiary was down lower in Canon City, we would play down there because there was snow on the field in Gunnison.

Thomas: Hmm.

Mark: So we played the convicts.

Thomas: Oh.

Mark: It's the only time I ever saw a shortstop smokin' a cigarette while he took warm-ups.

[Thomas and Isabel laugh]

Mark: You guys ... did you guys smoke in those days?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. I was well, I started smokin' when I was in the service. Yeah.

Mark: Really? You smoked in the service. But did you guys smoke as teenagers?

Thomas: I didn't smoke until after I'd been in the service coupla years. Never touched a cigarette.

Isabel: I never touched a cigarette. I got all the second-hand smoke that's bothering me. I wouldn't advise anybody to smoke.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah, she ... I used to tell her: "Hell, I don't smell that smoke in here." I said, "That's your imagination."

[Isabel and Mark laugh]

Mark: Well, listen ...

Thomas: And now I can't stand to have anybody smoke in our house and ... smell? God, I can smell that a mile away. And it never used to bother me.

Mark: Yeah. So you never went behind the barn and had a furtive cigarette or a cigar or somethin' like that without your parents knowin' about it?

Thomas: I never did, never did because I started smokin' when I was in the service and I was away from home.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: But I never smoked in front of my mother. She never did see me smoke.

Mark: She didn't smoke, either.

Thomas: Nope. Huh-mm. No. She never did smoke. Nobody in my family smoked. I was the only one. Well, my sister, Susie, smoked.

Mark: I gotta ask you this question before we quit. When you were a kid did you ever get into the wine or the beer and drink too much?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: New Year's Eve.

[both laugh]

Mark: Tell me about that.

Thomas: Well, it was our neighbors. Paul Nickcich lived right across the street from me. We got into his wine cellar on New Year's Eve. And, uh ... uh ... boy, we got pretty well loaded. And I even took my dad's shotgun out and shot it at midnight.

Mark: [chuckles]

Thomas: Boy, I got hell for that, I'll tell you. But, oh, I was sick the next day. I swore I'd never have another drink in my life. That's the first time I ever got loaded in my life. And, boy, I really got saturated. And, boy, that was foolish, too, takin' the doggone shotgun out and firin' it. That's what they used to do back in those days. New Year's Eve, everybody got their shotguns out and their guns and rifles and shot 'em in the air.

Mark: Well, did that teach you a lesson, or not?

Thomas: Well, it didn't stop me from havin' a drink once in a while. I never did drink that bad, though. When I was in the service I drank scotch and sodas quite a bit because they didn't give you a hangover. You could jump in the airplane the next morning and fly.  
[laughs] Yeah.

Mark: [laughs] OK, Well, listen, we've gotten .. we've talked here for nearly two hours.

Isabel: Oh, dear.

Mark: Yeah, and we haven't even gotten into the service yet. What are you doin' tomorrow mornin' ... the same time.

Thomas: Well, I'd like to get it over with if we could.

Mark: Would ya?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: You don't like this, or you just don't want to do it?

Thomas: Oh, it's fun. It's been fun. I'm enjoyin' it.

Mark: But you just don't wanta ... you don't like talkin' about the past, or what?

Thomas: Oh, I enjoy it. I ....

Mark: You just wanta get it done with.

Thomas: I think you're doin' a good job doin this.

Mark: Well, I'm enjoyin' it. I'm enjoyin' it. This is fun for me.

Thomas: Yeah. Well, it is for me, too, 'cause I'm bringin' around a lotta stuff that I've forgotten about.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Haven't you told Joe about all this stuff? Joe and Brent?

Isabel: Oh, maybe [undecipherable]

Thomas: Oh, once in a while, yeah. But they don't seem like they're too interested [laughs], I don't know.

Isabel: Well, you never really sit down and talk to 'em like that ... all day.

Thomas: Well ....

Isabel: That's what we used to do on New Year's Eve and that, all this ... bring up all their memories. And a few little arguments here and there about who did this and that, remember? It was fun.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Well, [addressing Isabel] I think that you and I need to sit down a little bit, too. I wanta know a little more about you 'cause I think if we know more about you we're gonna know more about Tom, too.

Isabel: Oh, well, I just stayed in one place all my life. [laughs] I didn't do much.

Mark: I don't believe it. I don't believe that, I'm sorry I don't think ... when people say they didn't do much it's not usually the case. I talked to a woman one time in Douglas. Gladys Hill ... and you know Gladys.

Isabel: Oh, Gladys. Aunt Gladys. We know her.

Mark: Linda's aunt.

Thomas: Oh, yeah.

Mark: She calls her, "Aunt Glad-ass".

Thomas: That's what we call her.

Isabel: Aunt Glad-ass.

Thomas: Yeah, sure. Aunt Gladys. We know who Aunt Gladys is, yes.

Isabel: Yeah, she's been here.

Mark: And you know, Isabel, when she ... when I interviewed her she didn't think she did anything important, either, except she kinda wanted to remember her pioneering experience on the homestead. And I said, "Look," I said, "You worked at Woolworth's. You were a community leader. You did a lot of pioneering work.

Thomas: Oh boy, she did, yeah.



Mark: Yeah, yeah. OK, well, let's cut this off and then we can ... we can do this again tomorrow at eight o'clock? Is that alright?

Isabel: That's fine.

Mark: And we'll finish it up.

Thomas: That's alright.

Mark: OK, good. Well, thank you.

Thomas: Alright. Thank you. I enjoyed it.

Mark: Whoops! OK, me, too. [Mark turns off the digital recorder].